

SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS MEETING

Town of Allenstown

May 8, 2019 | 6:30 PM, Economic Development Committee | 16 School Street

Meeting Summary

In attendance: **Scott McDonald**, Allenstown EDC (All), **Michael Frascinella**, Allenstown EDC (Hiking), **Jeffrey Venegas**, Allenstown EDC (all), **Derek Goodine**, Town Administrator, **Debbie Briscoe**, NH Horse Council (horse, hike, ski), **Armand Verville**, Allenstown Historical Society, **Kris Raymond**, Resident (all), **Brian Goss** (all), and **Craig Tufts**, CNHRPC staff.

Craig (CNHRPC) thanked the Economic Development Committee (EDC) for hosting this forum. He asked if the EDC had had discussions in the past about trails as part of an economic development strategy. They replied that they had not. Craig noted that many communities are seeing trails as part of an overall economic development strategy to enhance local quality of life, recreation options, and to bring visitors to town.

The rest of the guests introduced themselves and their trail interests.

Craig explained that the premise behind the Suncook Valley Trails Plan. He mentioned that other parts of the state have taken abandoned railroad beds and have turned them into popular rail trails. There have been recent successes west of Concord that have similarities to the existing railroad bed that runs from Suncook Village to Pittsfield (Blueberry Express). When this railroad bed was abandoned the property reverted back to the underlying property owners, so in order to open a public trail on corridor the broken up pieces would need to be stitched back together in some way. Craig noted that in places like Warner and Hopkinton several community members took the initiative to re-establish the rail bed for a trail and have had some success. This Suncook Valley Trails Plan hops to investigate the opportunity of doing something similar here, and to gauge the community for interest.

Craig also explained that in addition to the Suncook Valley rail line or “Blueberry Express” from Suncook to Pittsfield, there is perhaps an even better rail trail option paralleling the Merrimack River from Concord to Hooksett that passes just downhill from Suncook Village in Allenstown. Here too the corridor is a mix of private and public ownership that would need to be stitched back together. Craig noted that Hooksett had upgraded a portion of this rail bed down by the dog park and courthouse and is interested in extending it further, up to the Allenstown town line. He noted that Pembroke has been actively looking at the rail bed through their Master Plan update and had begun informal conversations with property owners. Residential developers in the area were supportive of the trail and appeared willing accommodate the trail as part of their projects.

Craig noted that because much of the rail bed is on private property, that any advancing of the rail trail idea would need approval of property owners. He noted that this plan does not intend to dictate what private property owners should do with their land. If the community desires a trail, a local group would need to

approach the landowner with a specific ask. If the landowner answers with a “no thank you” that decision must be respected. Often times property owners are willing to work with people advancing trails. In other communities, property owners have donated easements. Some property owners see the trail as adding value to their property.

After a group discussion on existing conditions, trail ideas, and possible routes, the group came to identify 4 areas of interest for trail development. Numbers 1 and 2 were agreed to be a much higher priority than 3 and 4.

- 1) Develop a Rail Trail from Hooksett to the China Mill** – The group identified this trail as the primary opportunity for the town. It was noted that there appears to be only one private property owner along this route. It appears to be a strategic decision to tie into the work already being done in Hooksett and perhaps partner with them on various aspects of trail building.
- 2) Bridge to Pembroke** – A rail-trail bridge connection would connect the Hooksett to Allenstown rail trail from the vicinity of China Mill over the canal and Suncook River to Pembroke. It was noted that this would require coordination between Allenstown and Pembroke. It was noted that the old railroad bridge piers are intact and a structure exists there now that carries utility pipes across. It was noted that the Sewer Commission/Department may be involved. Until a bridge can be built, an on-street connector should be identified.
- 3) Epsom to Bear Deerfield Rd/Bear Brook State Park** – The group felt that the railroad bed from Epsom could be used as a trail down to Deerfield road, but a washed out bridge and private property would be a consideration. An alternative route would be to use Black Hall Rd as the trail route. Black Hall Rd is a State Park road that is unmaintained for vehicle travel. It was noted that this is less of a priority than the Suncook Village area trail and would probably hold off until trail at the Epsom side of the town line is ready to advance.
- 4) Bear Brook State Park to Suncook Village** – The group felt that although it would be desirable to have an off street trail connecting Bear Brook State Park to Suncook Village, that such a large project appeared unrealistic at this time. Marking an on-street route using River Road and a short portion of Route 28 seemed the reasonable way to enhance a connection. River Road is pleasant for walking and bicycling under existing conditions.

Discussion ensued about the possible economic benefits of trails, particularly a conceptual trail from Hooksett to Pembroke. Members of the EDC and guests discussed trails in other places they had visited and noted how they appear to enhance the local economy. Derek noted some of his experience with trails while working in Maine.

Craig noted that the potential trail from Hooksett to Pembroke is a preferred route for the proposed Granite State Rail Trail, which would go from Salem at the Massachusetts border to Lebanon at the Vermont border, about 115 miles. Along the GSRT route, the 54 mile Northern Rail Trail from Lebanon to Boscawen is completed. Most of the Salem to Manchester rail trail is completed (Salem Bike-Ped corridor, Windham Rail Trail, Derry Rail Trail, Londonderry Rail Trail, South Manchester Trail). The Allenstown trail would help fill a gap in the Granite

State Rail Trail between Manchester to Concord. The group discussed how being along a long-distance trail could be economically advantageous to Allenstown.

Also discussed was a need to coordinate with neighboring towns of Pembroke and Hooksett. The Sewer Commission/Department may also be a partner, as they own rights of way and use the bridge structure for utility pipes.

The group discussed what trail uses would be appropriate. All agreed the bicycling and walking would be a primary target. Meeting attendees appeared open to the idea of snowmobile use. There was uncertainty about permitting ATV along the corridor. It was noted that future meetings and discussions would need to work out appropriate trail uses, and that property owners would have the primary say in the matter.

The meeting concluded with some attendees interested in pursuing the rail trail concept further and wished to be included in any further discussions.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45.

Meeting Summary by Craig Tufts, CNHRPC | 603.226.6020 | ctufts@cnhrpc.org